

Story 2069 (Transcribed by
Ahmet Ali Arslan from his
tape and later used in his
unpublished dissertation.)

Narrator: Ayvaz Işık, 62,
farmer

Location: Hakveyis village,
Iğdır, capital of
Iğdır Province

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Astrologer for a Sultan

In an earlier time there were a man and wife who for years lived happily together. One day, however, suddenly something happened to their relationship. The woman said to her husband, "My man, you must become an astrologer. you do not, I shall leave you." [The inept narrator has omitted the wife's rationale for making this demand. In other versions of the tale, the wife resents having been ignored by the attendants at a public bath while the wife of the padishah's chief astrologer was treated with much attention and respect.]

"Oh, my wife, how can I become an astrologer?"

"I do not know that, but I do know that I shall leave you unless you manage to do so."

The husband had no choice but to pretend that he was an astrologer. He wrote a book, placed it beneath his arm, began to walk the streets of the city trying to look like an educated man. At first people paid no attention to him, one day a woman stopped him and asked him to tell her fortune

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He asked this woman a few questions and then pretended to be consulting something in his book. Then he predicted what her future would be like. The woman was so pleased with his prediction that she told many of her friends about it, and as a result, the pretended astrologer soon gained a reputation as a man having occult powers.

One day the wife of the sultan lost a packet of golden liras. When she was unable to discover what had happened to that packet, she ordered a servant to consult the new astrologer about their location. The servant went to the astrologer and explained to him the problem of the sultan's wife. As she sat on the ground talking, her legs were spread far enough apart so that her private parts were visible. The astrologer said aloud what he was thinking, "Woman, there is hair showing between the legs."

When the servant returned to the palace and repeated the astrologer's words, the wife of the sultan suddenly remembered something. "Ah!" she said. "Now I know! While I was at the public bath, I placed my packet of golden liras behind the water tap I was using." The servant ran rapidly to the bath and found the golden liras right where the wife of the sultan had indicated. The sultan's wife rewarded

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the new astrologer with quite a large sum of money, and he now became famous

Not long after that, the sultan's treasury was robbed. The sultan's viziers said to him, "Your Majesty, there is a very wise astrologer in our city. He is probably the only one capable of identifying the criminals who stole your wealth." They then located the new astrologer and took him into the presence of the sultan.

The ruler said to the astrologer, "Someone has stolen everything from my treasury. You are to find out who committed this crime

The pretended astrologer consulted his book. He actually had almost no education, but he had to do something in response to the sultan's order. He pretended to study his book for several minutes, and then he said, "My padishah, give me forty days to solve this robbery. I shall also need forty watermelons." The sultan ordered his attendants to deliver forty watermelons to the astrologer's home at once.

In the meantime the thieves heard that the famous astrologer would soon identify them as the criminals. They decided to send one of their members to the astrologer's

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home to observe what was going on there and, if possible, overhear through the chimney what was being said there

While the first thief was watching and listening outside the astrologer's house, the astrologer signaled to his wife to bring a watermelon. After the two of them had eaten that melon, the astrologer said, "Well, that is one of the forty."

The thief thought that the astrologer was talking about him, for he did not know that the wise man had been given forty melons. He rushed back to the robbers' den and said excitedly to the leader, "That astrologer knew that I was outside his house. I was hidden and I made no noise of any kind, but after I had been there for a short time, he said, 'Well, that is one of the forty!'"

The leader of the thieves sent another man to the astrologer's house to eavesdrop on the second night. Again the astrologer and his wife ate a watermelon, and after they were finished with it, the astrologer said, "Well, that is the second of the forty."

When the second eavesdropper returned and reported this the leader of the thieves summoned all of his men to meet with him. They were all convinced that the astrologer had

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identified them as the men who had robbed the royal treasury. What should they do? Some said, "Let us do this," and others said, "Let us do that." They finally decided to go to the astrologer and bribe him not to reveal their guilt to the sultan.

[Again the narrator has truncated this tale. In most variants suspense is built up by having a number of thieves believe that their respective presences outside the astrologer's house have been detected. After six or eight of the thieves have come to that conclusion, the action is telescoped to the thirty-ninth night, when the thirty-ninth thief reaches the same conclusion. It is at that point that the thieves rush to make a deal with the astrologer before the arrival of the fatal fortieth day.]

The thieves rushed to the astrologer and said, "Yes, we are guilty of robbing the treasury. We shall return every single item that we stole if you will not report us to the sultan. We shall also give you a large amount of money." [In the present variant this episode ends here. In other variants the ruler demands some explanation for the sudden and unexpected return of his hoard of valuables, and so the astrologer has to invent an arguably rational account of the recovery of the contents of the treasury.]

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The sultan was so pleased by the service provided to him by the astrologer that soon afterwards he said to that man, "I value your work so much that I want you and your wife to live henceforth in the palace." The wife was pleased by this move, but the astrologer himself was not. He had been fortunate so far, but he wondered how long it would be before it would be revealed that he really knew nothing about astrology

During the following month a Mevlüt¹ service was to be held at a large mosque. The sultan was so pleased with the astrologer that he said to him, "I want you to direct the musicians and singers and to read the appropriate prayers." The astrologer was stunned by this order. How could he direct a performance about which he was quite ignorant? How could he read a prayer when he was not very literate? [Again there is a truncation of the tale as the narrator moves from the astrologer's misgivings about directing of the service to his physical presence there.]

¹A cantata rehearsing the birth and life of Mohammed. Written in Bursa by Süleyman Çelebi in 1409, Mevlüt (Mevlit, Mevlid) is said to be the most important piece of sacred music produced during the Ottoman era in Turkey. It involves both singing and instrumental music; it is a Moslem requiem performed 40 days after the death of a person and subsequently at any time that one wishes (and can afford) such a memorial service. Assembling all the necessary singers and musicians and providing the required sweetmeats for the audience is rather expensive, and so sponsoring a Mevlüt is not a matter undertaken lightly.

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In desperation he rushed out of the mosque, and everyone else followed him. When the last man had fled into the courtyard, the mosque suddenly tumbled down.

People crowded around the astrologer and asked, "O wise man, how did you know that the building was going to collapse?" To this question the astrologer gave no response.

Time passed, and then one day the sultan decided that he would like to leave the city for a few days and travel to other parts of his realm. He asked the astrologer to accompany him on this short trip. After preparations had been made for their journey, the two of them set out riding fine horses. An hour or so later the sultan saw something ahead on their route, but it was too distant for him to determine what it was. "What do you suppose that is?" he asked his traveling companion.

"That is a date palm tree, and it has two dates on it," answered the astrologer. When they finally reached the object, it proved to be just what the astrologer had described: a date palm tree with two dates on it

But the astrologer's guardian spirit suddenly appeared and spoke to him, though the sultan neither saw nor heard this third being. "Change your behavior, and don't do

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such a thing again! When the sultan asked you what the distant object was, you should not have described something about which you were ignorant. You should have said, 'Oh, I guess that it may be a rock or a tree of some kind.' I had to fly with utmost speed to bring this date tree with two dates from Bagdad in order to save your reputation. Don't ever do such a thing again!"